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Audrey C. Rust

President

Peninsula Open Space Trust

July 15, 2003

To Revise the Boundaries of The Golden Gate National Recreation Area in the State of California, to Restore and Extend the Term of the Advisory Commission for the Recreation Area, and for Other Purposes.

The Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) appreciates this opportunity to request your support of H.R. 532, which extends the southwest boundary of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) to encompass the 4,262-acre Rancho Corral de Tierra property and some additional 800 acres of land located in coastal San Mateo County, California. The availability of this much national park quality land in a major metropolitan area that has seen and continues to experience intense urban growth represents a rare opportunity.

PENINSULA OPEN SPACE TRUST

POST is a nonprofit land trust located in Menlo Park, California. POST is the owner of the 4,262-acre Rancho Corral de Tierra property under consideration today by House Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands. Our organization works in partnership with public agencies and private citizens to create parks and to give permanent protection to open lands in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties in California. Since our founding 26 years ago, we have participated in saving more than 52,000 acres of wetlands, forest, grassland, beaches and farmland.

POST is a land trust works to acquire land for permanent protection. During the time land is in POST's ownership it is not open to the public. With appropriate protective measures in place, POST transfers these lands to public or private ownership. We have partnered with many federal, state, regional and local public agencies. We partner with private buyers when land is to be used for agriculture or is best suited for private stewardship.

With the assistance of the federal government, POST added the Phleger Estate to the GGNRA as well as Bair Island and other wetlands to the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. These projects have brought together federal, state and local agencies and have had substantial participation by the private donor community.

SIGNIFICANCE

H.R. 532 is a critical step in achieving a long-held goal to place this dramatic and strategically important property into the ownership of the National Park Service. The passage of H.R. 532 will make possible federal ownership of the unique lands of Montara Mountain, creating a highly visible and spectacular southern entrance to the park along the Pacific coast, protecting significant ecological resources and linking tens of thousands of acres of existing federal, state, and county parklands.

The 4,262 acres of Rancho Corral de Tierra encompass a nearly intact 1839 Mexican land grant, named Corral de Tierra-Palomares. It is adjacent on the north and east sides to other GGNRA lands, most notably the 23,000-acre San Francisco Watershed lands over which the National Park Service holds a protective and recreational easement, and to the north McNee Ranch State Park (780 acres) and San Mateo County San Pedro Valley Park (978 acres), with further linkages to the GGNRA.

The lands proposed for annexation offer an unparalleled scenic addition to the park. The rise of Montara Mountain from the sea to nearly 2,000 feet is a striking sight. The coastal ridge-tops provide one of the most

spectacular panoramic views to be found in northern California, sweeping from the San Francisco Bay and the East Bay hills, past the Point Reyes peninsula and Farallone Islands to Pescadero Point - 65 miles from north to south as the crow flies. The peaks of Montara Mountain dominate the setting of this part of the GGNRA and will dramatically define the southern limits of the park and "establish a clear and logical southern entrance" as found by the San Mateo County Boundary Study that was submitted to the committee in May 2001 and re-submitted with H.R. 532 this year.

The property contains four coastal creeks with runs of federally-listed threatened steelhead trout. The riparian areas serve as habitat for the threatened California red-legged frog and San Francisco garter snake, provide a vital source of water, increased cover, feeding and nesting opportunities and migration corridors for the abundant wildlife in the area. Other species of concern that inhabit the properties are Cooper's hawk, the dusky-footed woodrat, California brown pelican, common murre, and the San Bruno elfin butterfly. Bobcat, brush rabbits, kestrels, California quail, several species of hawk, mountain lions and eagles are among dozens of other wildlife species found on the property.

Due to the topography, climate and natural condition of the site, the plant assemblages of Montara Mountain are considered by biologists to be genuinely unique, displaying plants, soils and exposures found together nowhere else on earth. Seven plants on site are included in the California Native Plant Society's inventory of species of particular concern. Two of these plants, the Montara manzanita (*Arctostaphylos montaraensis*) and Montara blue lupine (*Lupinus eximius*), are found nowhere in the world other than Montara Mountain and are federally listed. Three other federally listed rare and endangered plant species have been identified: coast rock cress (*Arabis blepharophylla*), San Francisco wallflower (*Erysimum franciscanum*) and Hickman's cinquefoil (*Potentilla hickmanii*).

The boundary study undertaken by Peninsula Open Space Trust, and prepared in conjunction with the National Park Service, also found that acquisition of these properties will not impose a significant new management burden on the National Park Service. There are no buildings or other facilities which would require Park Service maintenance expenditures. Principal management requirements would include trail maintenance, fire management and other natural resource management measures already carried out in adjacent areas of the park. Furthermore, the proposed park expansion would benefit the recovery of species within the area and benefit populations existing on adjacent lands already within the GGNRA. Preservation of these properties will contribute significantly to the effectiveness of ecosystem management in the area, avoiding the problems that so often plague other park sites where important components of park ecosystems are outside of park control.

CULTURAL USES

Three generations of the Lea family have been tenant farmers on this land. When POST assumed ownership we found that the farmers had been operating on six-month and one-year leases, under constant threat of loss of the farmland due to the fact that each of the former owners had development plans for the property, which would have eliminated agricultural operations. Until POST took over there was no possibility of family ownership or long-term leases for these farmers.

At this time, I would like to register POST's unease about having to reveal private, landowner and tenant confidential information. Due to third-party concerns about plans to have these lands included within the boundary of the GGNRA, POST has had to make public information that would otherwise remain confidential between landowner and tenant.

In 2001, POST entered into an option to purchase the 4,262 acres and took over management of Rancho Corral de Tierra. POST continued to lease farmland to the Lea family. POST has worked well with the family over several years on this and other agricultural property in the area.

After taking ownership of the Rancho Corral property we entered into discussions with Mr. David Lea and his family regarding the sale, subject to conservation easements, of the 232-acre Rancho Corral farm. These negotiations need to be treated confidentially as they entail private business matters of the Lea family (Cabrillo Farms). Mr. David Lea, spokesperson for the family, supports the inclusion of the farmland in the boundaries of the GGNRA. Please find his letter of support for H.R. 532 attached.

If the Lea family chooses to own this land they are obviously concerned that they would be able to sell it should the need arise to realize their investment in the property. Farming on the San Mateo County coast is experiencing acute financial difficulties and very few, if any, farmers may be interested in buying the land at

the time the Lea family might need to sell. With the property's inclusion in the GGNRA, the federal government could become a fair market buyer should no farmer be available to purchase the land. The option of selling to the GGNRA would not be open to them if the land is not within the park boundary. In addition, the Lea family could also consider selling the land to the GGNRA while retaining a lease allowing them to continue their farming operation - another option not open if the land is not included in the boundary.

If the Lea family does not or cannot purchase the 232-acres for farming, it is POST's intention to continue leasing these areas to them and other family farmers for as long it is viable or reasonable for the organization to do so. Because POST is obligated to pay property taxes on leased land, the instability of farming in the area, and other related matters, the financial ability of POST to continue to hold this land far into the future is questionable.

In addition to the immediate concerns of the landowner and farmer, these acres by and of themselves, as indicated in the Boundary Study, deserve inclusion in the GGNRA if the long history of farming is no longer viable- as sad as that may be.

These agricultural areas are found on four separate parcels of land; three parcels abut State Scenic Highway 1 and one parcel is tucked in the middle of Rancho Corral de Tierra in Denniston Valley. Three of the coastal streams mentioned earlier run through the agricultural areas: Denniston Creek, San Vicente Creek and Martini Creek, making the 232 acres long-term protection important from a species-of-concern perspective.

Should the time come to move these lands into federal ownership, the considerable scenic value would be assured. There are also logical recreational trail connections that could be realized. To remove these parcels from H.R. 532 would create an irregular boundary and detract from the rural, scenic quality of the San Mateo coast.

SUPPORT

Inclusion of these lands in the GGNRA is endorsed by numerous groups and public officials. At the well-attended public hearing held at the beginning of this process on June 26, 2001 in Half Moon Bay, CA, every speaker was in favor of this addition. Elected officials, representatives of the San Mateo County Farm Bureau, equestrian groups, neighbors and environmental groups unanimously applauded the project.

Additionally, a hearing was held on July 26, 2001 before the subcommittee on National Parks of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, which passed with support from the Department of Interior.

The entire San Francisco Bay Area delegation including both of California's Senators support this effort that was nearly enacted in the 107th Congress. Both Houses acted on the measure but issues unrelated to the boundary extension intervened in the closing days of the session which precluded final action on the bill. POST asks that this legislation be enacted in this session. The Senate Energy Committee has already passed its legislation (S. 302) and we, as the landowner, hope you will do the same.

FUNDING

This project continues to demonstrate the kind of public-private partnership that has led to so much success in land conservation. POST paid \$29,750,000 for the property which it is prepared to sell to the federal government for \$15,000,000 once the boundary expansion has been approved.

POST has secured commitments for the needed matching funds -- \$14,750,000 million from state and local private sources. The state funds carry the stipulation that federal participation of \$15,000,000 be achieved within 5 years, which makes the timing of this boundary expansion critical.

The state and private funds are secure. The committed State of California funds will come from bonds, the issuance of which is not threatened by the state's current budget crisis. Our local private commitments have been realized. We are now are looking to the federal government to realize this dynamic three-way partnership.

In order to obtain this property at a favorable price which will benefit the federal government, POST used its "working capital" land fund as a loan to the project. Because we were able to borrow from our own fund, and not pay commercial interest rates, POST will be able to continue to hold the land through the estimated two

to three more years it will take to achieve the appropriation needed for acquisition by the National Park Service. Putting so much of our capital into a project for so many years is a considerable cost to POST and, of course, prohibits us from undertaking other locally focused land conservation projects in our area.

CONCLUSION

Expanding the boundary of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area to include Rancho Corral de Tierra through such a beneficial partnership is an opportunity not to be missed. A vast land within a major metropolitan area that offers extraordinary scenic views, a place with plants found nowhere else on earth, a home for rare and endangered animals, is available now for our protection and enjoyment. We have the chance to enjoy this special land and to leave a lasting legacy for our children and our grandchildren. Extending the boundary of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area to include this property is an essential step. Please make all of this possible by supporting H.R. 532.

Supplemental Sheet for H.R. 532 Testimony

July 15, 2003

To Revise the Boundaries of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in the State of California

FULL NAME: Audrey C. Rust

ADDRESS: Peninsula Open Space Trust

3000 Sand Hill Rd., 4-135

Menlo Park, CA 94025

PHONE: 650-854-7696

SUMMARY/RECOMMENDATIONS:

Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) purchased the 4,262 acre property known as Rancho Corral de Tierra over a period of three years starting in May 2001 culminating in January 2003. As the landowner and willing seller, POST wholly endorses H.R. 532 and seeks the House Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands support of this legislation.

These lands offer a stunning southern entrance which the Golden Gate National Recreation Area park currently lacks. Additionally, natural resources on the property are deserving of protection - the plants species found here are found nowhere else on earth and it is home for rare and endangered animals.

There is a three-way public-private partnership (federal-state-local) of which half has been pledged and is dependant upon federal participation to be achieved within 5 years.

Pass H.R. 532.

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